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ABSTRACT

The rationale for and negative results of structured preschool programs are examined, and an alternative model based on research is suggested for use with multiply handicapped infants. Major aspects of the model are seen to include a combination of modeling and reinforcement, increased focus on nonverbal communication, and emphasis on a "match" between teachers and parents and children. The model is reported as beneficial in that it supports the mother and encourages the teachers to be more like parents, is more appropriate developmentally for the needs of infants, and provides a view of child rearing which stresses the family rather than institutions. (SBH)

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TEACHERS AS MOTHERS: AN INNOVATIVE CONCEPTUAL RATIONALE FOR A PROGRAM FOR MULTIPLY HANDICAPPED INFANTS

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Abstract

The history of the rationale for structured preschool programs is traced and analyzed, and the negative results of the incorporation of this rationale into infant education discussed. An alternative model of infant education and infant teaching based in research on infancy is presented with the benefits of the alternative model.

TEACHERS AS MOTHERS

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Anecdote: At a meeting of a parent group a mother of a 3-month-old asked the speaker on language development if there are any sounds she should make to encourage her baby to respond. The speaker answered that she should make any sounds she wants to and to take her cue from the baby as to which he enjoys. At that point the president of the group interrupted to say that she had a book which tells parents how to be teachers which gives a list of three specific sounds to use each month.

The 1960's have been called a "renaissance" of early childhood education (Anderson & Shane, 1971). Society came to believe that early childhood education could cure everything from tooth decay to juvenile delinquency. Mesmerized by their own propaganda, early childhood educators made extravagant claims. When the first Head Start evaluation raised questions about the efficacy of early childhood education as a treatment there were several reactions. Some educators concluded that the diffuseness of the nursery school enrichment model was at fault and advocated systematic, structured, cognitively oriented preschool programs. Others attributed the apparent lack of

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effect to "too little too late" and argued for infant education, educational day care, parent education and follow-up programs. One result was structured infant programs.

The Disparagement of Maternal Styles

As part of the analysis of early childhood education which occurred in the wake of the Westinghouse Report, distinctions were made between instructional, therapeutic and maternal teaching styles (Katz, 1969). "Maternal" generally implied caretaking as the focus of the role. Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) correctly argued that children in a two to three hour compensatory program needed more than a second mother. Maternal teaching styles, and by implication, natural mothering, were belittled. Numerous programs appeared urging parents to be teachers, clinicians and therapists. In a typical book directed at changing parents into teachers, parents were urged to discard "aimless play" for "educational play" (p. 220) and not to leave the precious years of infancy to chance (Painter, 1971). Results ranging from failure in school to the destruction of technological civilization were presented as the alternative.

This trend toward the disparagement of both maternal teaching styles and mothering was based both in a naive concept of mothering and in an overreaction to the research findings of the sixties. Since the sixties and the Westinghouse report, much discussion has occurred on appropriate ways of evaluating programs for young children. Few educators today would accept

standardized measures of primarily cognitive functioning as adequate data for evaluation. However, at the time of the Westinghouse report, the program rather than the evaluation design first came under attack.

In the sixties, little literature was available on the educational role of mothers. In the last decade, observational studies have suggested that mothering is a complex role which has educational implications (White and Watts, 1973). While the analysis of brief early education programs helped clarify the problems and conceptualization of the field, assumptions derived from this analysis became part of the unexamined ideology of early education. These assumptions, appropriate to brief compensatory programs, were also incorporated inappropriately into infant education. While a 4-year-old in a brief compensatory program may not need a maternal figure, an infant, for whom the mother is so crucial (Bowlby, 1969) will require a teacher who incorporates maternal elements in her style, particularly if the program is all day. Mothers who keep their infants at home should be encouraged to recognize the value of their unstructured mothering activities.

There are three negative results of the incorporation of instructional models inappropriately in these areas: the impairment of child performance, the undermining of family functioning and a subtle but pervasive prejudice in the field of early education. Bronfenbrenner (1973b) has analyzed the results of longitudinal studies of intervention programs and concluded that programs that support the mother facilitate long-range stable

gains in functioning, while those which undercut the mother produce minimal gains at best, and may result in impaired child performance. He has also argued, on the basis of a review of experimental studies of learning (1973a) that the family with its complementary roles is the most powerful source of child learning. Values, life styles and institutions in contemporary society in general, and education in particular, have not supported families as child rearing settings. It has been expedient to create new institutions rather than facilitate family functioning. Finally, Baratz and Baratz (1971) have pointed out the subtle institutional racism involved in the assumptions of many infant and day care programs. Since infant programs and educational day care are frequently directed to so-called "high risk" populations (with high risk incorrectly equated with low SES or minority group membership), there is an implication that educators feel that "poor" people are not capable of adequately rearing children. Baratz and Baratz have suggested that the inevitable and conceivable extension of this logic is eugenics and institutional child rearing.

An Alternative Model for Infant Education

Both Zigler (1972) and Bronfenbrenner (1973b) have asserted that families are the best institution for child raising, particularly for young children. Both have argued that only those interventions that are directed at families, rather than children, create lasting gains in children's performance. They have suggested that structured infant intervention programs be reserved for children who are genuinely high risk for developmental

delay--handicapped and bilingual children, and those from families in crisis. While infant programs for children of poverty families generally have not demonstrated significant successes, those for children with specific handicaps (Bobath, 1967; Fraiberg, 1971) have. Zigler and Bronfenbrenner suggest that the most effective strategy for optimum development of most infants is a more vigorous support of family life. Their arguments imply that whenever possible the mother and family should be rearing the child. When intervention is necessary the program should be directed at the family as a whole and supportive of the parents. Such intervention, to be developmentally appropriate, must incorporate the best aspects of family life. This strategy does not mean that mothers, who wish or need to work or study and who place their children in infant programs, are inadequate. Rather it supports mothers and fathers who wish to raise their normal infants without the guidance of clinical plans and specially designed equipment. While structured infant education is not a panacea, neither is it plague.

What then are the bases for a developmentally appropriate model for teachers of infants when infant programs are necessary? Research on family functioning provides some suggestions. White and Watts (1973) suggest that good mothering involves positive attitudes toward the child's learning, much energy, toleration of disorder and risk, and learning which takes place spontaneously throughout the day in the context of natural interaction. White and Watts make it clear that mothers who produce

competent children do very little structured teaching, but rather design the environment and encourage interaction which facilitates learning. This ability to get in learning, "on the fly" (p. 243) would be an important aspect of an infant teacher's role.

Research on families suggests that a mixture of roles and styles may enrich the infant environment. Escalona (1968) found that infants receive carefully modulated stimulation from mothers and intense stimulation in an affectively positive setting from fathers. The first type of situation is ideal for teaching the infant to process stimuli while the second is ideal for teaching the infant to tolerate a range of stimuli. Bronfenbrenner (1973a) found that children learn most in settings in which there are two experimenters, with the experimenter of the same sex serving as a model while the experimenter of the opposite sex serves as a reinforcer. This combination of modeling and reinforcement, found primarily in families, provides a powerful learning setting. While competency models for teachers of young children have generally been formulated with an identical set of competencies for all teachers, this research by Escalona and Bronfenbrenner suggests that several individuals (male and female) with diverse complementary styles might provide a richer interpersonal environment in infant educational settings. The focus on diverse styles would give more opportunity for infant-caregiver "matches."

An increased focus on nonverbal communication would be another aspect of the model. Most of the infant programs have stressed what Spitz (1965) has called "diacritic" communication. This is communication that is primarily auditory, with language

features such as arbitrariness and specificity. However, Spitz has pointed out that much of the early communication between mother and child, which is essential for full personality growth, is diffuse, tactile and kinesthetic. Mantagu (1972)has presented an exhaustive argument that this tactile contact is crucial to optimum physiological, cognitive and affective functioning. It would seem to be appropriate for the infant teacher to stress such nonverbal forms of communication.

Some evidence exists that in the area of instruction, strategies which provide a rich environment result in greater or more complex achievement than limited strategies. For instance, Palmer (1972) found that countrary to his hypothesis, infants in the unstructured "discovery" group outperformed those in the "concept" training group. Cazden (1965) similarly found that children given varied unsystematic language feedback made greater gains in linguistic performance than those given systematic language feedback. Wohlwill (1973) has argued that unstructured learning situations are necessary for the achievement of generalization in young children. In addition, both theory (Piaget, 1954) and research (Torrance, 1970; Wolff, Levin, & Longobardi, 1974) suggest that young children learn through situations in which they can act on objects.

While specific, highly structured therapy is a necessary intervention for certain kinds of handicaps (e.g. Bobath, 1967), most of the successful infant programs have stressed the mother-child interaction (e.g. Fraiberg, 1971). There has been a tendency for infant curricula to stress (1) toy centered activities or

(2) activities drawn from normative studies, such as those of Gesell and Piaget. Such rich areas of activity as expression, creativity, problem-solving, esthetic appreciation and cultural traditions have been neglected. Research does not support such intervention and curriculum choices.

The final component of the model is the importance of a "match" between teachers and parents and children. While the concept of the match has been part of early childhood orthodoxy for many years (e.g., Hunt, 1969) program models have continued to be advocated as if they provide the optimum setting for all children. Research which has analyzed the performance and behavior of different children in different settings (Bissell, 1973; Prescott, 1973) indicates that different settings are most productive for different children. Nelson (1973) found that both a match in vocabulary styles between mothers and children and the ability of parents to correctly interpret children's meanings facilitated language learning. This match in interpretation is especially important for the teacher of infants. The ability of mothers to interpret and respond to subtle infant cues has been found to facilitate both cognitive and affective development (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972).

Thus the outline of a model of an infant teacher emerges. The teacher is enthusiastic about her infants' learning and incorporates learning naturally throughout the day. Teachers with varying roles and styles provide complementary input. Nonverbal communication and rich unstructured experience is provided along with verbal communication and occasional structured experiences.

The teacher tries to coordinate his style to the infants, and to interpret the infant's behavior as meaningful. Whenever possible the infant teacher functions as a resource and support to the parents, rather than a direct instructor of the child.

Benefits of the Model

The benefits of this model are many. Research has demonstrated that the most effective infant programs are those which support the mother. So far, instructional infant programs as a whole have not demonstrated the large, stable gains in intellectual functioning which were predicted (Palmer, 1972; Schaefer & Aronson, 1972). At least one observer of children who had participated in experimental infant day care has questioned the normality of their affective functioning (Weber, 1970). The experimental programs have employed relatively structured learning settings in which child rearing is seen as the role of a specialist. The model proposed in this paper, which encourages parents to be parents and teachers to be more like parents, enhances rather than impairs parent-child interaction which in turn strengthens the motivation to learn in the infant (Bronfenbrenner, 1973b) and is so likely to enhance overall development of the infant.

The second benefit is that such a model is more appropriate developmentally, and thus a better match, for the needs of infants. Prescott, Jones and Kritchevsky (1972) have analyzed the differences between day care and homes as child rearing environments and demonstrated the lack of congruence between the developmental needs of young children and day care. A similar analysis of in-

fant programs which treat babies as if they were kindergarteners would show a similar lack of congruence.

The model presented here is more socially responsible than the model prevalent in the field today. This model restores to the family the responsibility of child rearing. The model carries with it the warning that if our children are our future, society must be more supportive of families. It does not imply that poor people as a group cannot raise children well.

The final benefit of the model is in the area of the human services short-fall. Estimates have been made (Lynn & Salasin, 1974) that the amount of services in the form of programs which would be needed to deal with social problems is beyond the capabilities of society. This short-fall problem will only be exacerbated by the perception of more and more programs as necessities. Innovative solutions which do not require programs are the only pragmatic approach to this problem. A view of child rearing which stresses the family rather than new institutions and reserves formal infant education for populations for whom it is an effective strategy allows the possibility of such solutions. Maternity leaves, tax benefits to employers who provide part-time employment tax deductions for child care and insurance benefits for parents working part-time, might be less costly to society than a system of institutions for child rearing.

It is time to assess honestly the infant field of infant education. Which assumptions have become orthodoxy? Are the negative results of research as well as the positive results being incorporated in the conceptual rationales of new programs? Are

the most creative alternatives being generated? How is the professionalization of child rearing affecting family and societal patterns?

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